

Murphy Unveils Bipartisan Federal Legislation to Provide More Supportive Housing for People with Disabilities; "Frank Melville Act", Named After Connecticut Housing Leader

Contact: Kristen Bossi

(202) 225-4476

Chris speaks at a press conference at Torrington Towers to announce his bipartisan bill on affordable housing for people with disabilities.

TORRINGTON, CT - Today, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) unveiled legislation, cosponsored by Republican Congresswoman Judy Biggert (IL-13), to spur new affordable housing construction to meet the increasing demand for affordable, supportive housing for people with disabilities. Supportive housing traditionally provides services, such as daily living skills and housekeeping assistance, to allow people with disabilities to live independently.

"We've got to do better to provide for the housing needs of people with disabilities. It should be a national responsibility to help people live independently, with optional services if they choose," said Murphy, who is on the Housing Subcommittee of the Financial Services Committee.

Murphy's work on this issue began after learning from Connecticut housing and health experts about the dire need to provide more supportive housing units in the state. The demand for affordable, supportive housing outweighs the level of funding available - for example, the state's Next Steps Supportive Housing Initiative recently funded several hundred units, but almost 1400 units were left unfunded.

Working closely with affordable housing experts and mental health professionals in Connecticut, Murphy has introduced legislation, the "Frank Melville Supportive Housing Investment Act of 2008," to update a national housing statute often referred to as "section 811". This statute is the only federal housing program dedicated to helping extremely low income citizens with serious disabilities live independently in a community environment with a support system.

Murphy's bill would provide states with a new infusion of critically needed Section 811 capital and funding designed to invigorate the creation of thousands of new permanent supportive housing units. This goal would be achieved by simply using existing affordable housing funding in a more efficient manner in partnership with state housing finance agencies, local governments, and non-profit housing providers.

Affordable housing of all kinds is becoming increasingly difficult to find. In September 2007, the Connecticut Department of Social Services received 50,000 applications for only 1,000 Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and State Rental Assistance Program grants. Adding to the affordable housing squeeze, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that by 2030 there will be about 71.5 million people over 65 years old living in the nation, more than twice their number in 2000. As the elderly population continues to grow, the number low income housing units available for the elderly and people with disabilities needs to increased.

"I am delighted that Congressman Murphy is taking a leadership role to reinvigorate and modernize the HUD Section 811 program. Finding affordable housing with supports for our citizens with disabilities such as serious mental illness is vital to their rehabilitation. Unfortunately, this is all too often simply not available. HR 5772 is an important step in correcting this deficiency," said Al Atherton, President of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Connecticut (NAMI-CT).

"We are very pleased that this bill is designed to increase the availability of affordable rental units for people with disabilities," said Patrick Johnson, President of the Connecticut Institute for the Blind.

Murphy's legislation is named after the late Frank Melville, the first chair of the Melville Charitable Trust which has been a leading source of funding for supportive housing for more than fifteen years.

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